

Fire safety for churches and places of worship. Fire Sprinklers offer best protection!

Check with your fire department to learn fire and life safety requirements in state and local building and fire codes.

Arson fires due to vandalism or to cover a crime are the leading causes of church fires. Faulty wiring is the second most common cause of church fires. If your church building is more than twenty years old, you should have the wiring inspected by a qualified electrical contractor. To keep your church safe from fire, follow these guidelines.

- 1 Prevention** – Remember prevention is your best defense against fire.
 - ☐ All exit doors should open outwards, with no locks or fasteners that could prevent persons from escaping.
 - ☐ Keep exits free of obstruction at all times.
 - ☐ Make sure all exits are clearly marked with lighted signs.
 - ☐ Have remodeling, additions or repairs inspected by the Fire Marshal for compliance with local fire codes.
 - ☐ Have the furnace cleaned and professionally inspected once a year. Keep the furnace area clean, with no storage allowed, keep furnace room door closed at all times.
 - ☐ Make sure wall sockets and light switches have face plates.
 - ☐ Keep kitchen stoves clean and well maintained.
 - ☐ Make sure all upholstery, draperies and furnishings are fire-retardant fabrics.
 - ☐ Do not allow smoking in church facilities.
 - ☐ Avoid using candles or open flames of any type.
 - ☐ Check the church organ frequently to make sure it's turned off. If left on, the motor can overheat or short, causing a fire hazard.
 - ☐ Clean up after social gatherings—on the same day, just following the event.

- 2 Protection** – a very important step in protecting against church fires!
 - ☐ **Early Warning** – Early warning systems range from battery-operated smoke detectors to hard-wired central station alarms. All provide valuable warning in case of fire. As a minimal protection, install smoke detectors throughout your building. Clean and test detectors regularly. Replace batteries as recommended by the manufacturer or at least once a year.
 - ☐ **Fire Sprinklers** – Offer the highest degree of fire protection available. Sprinkler systems can control or extinguish fires before they spread.
 - ☐ **Escape Plan** – Make emergency escape plans and post them in each area of the building.
 - ☐ **Fire Extinguishers** – Check with your fire department for requirements. Usually multi-purpose Class ABC fire extinguishers are recommended. Sponsor a class through your fire department and be sure many members of the congregation know how to use the extinguishers before an emergency.

- 3 Be Prepared** – Know what to do in case of fire.
 - ☐ Don't rush out into the hallway. Feel the door. If it is hot, ensure another way out. If the door is cool, leave by the nearest exit.
 - ☐ If your building has a public announcement system, listen carefully and follow directions.
 - ☐ Never use elevators in a fire. Use the stairs. Close all doors behind you to slow fire spread.
 - ☐ Get out and stay out. Go directly to your planned meeting place and stay there. If you think someone is trapped inside, notify the fire department.
 - ☐ If you can't escape, stuff wet towels, sheets or clothes around the door and vents to keep smoke out. Call the fire department and tell them where you are. If no smoke is coming in the room you're in, open a window slightly both at the top and at the bottom. Stay low and wave a bright cloth, towel or sheet out the window to signal your location.

References: NFPA 912 *Fire Protection in Places of Worship* 1993 Edition; National Church Arson Task Force "Church Threat Assessment Guide," 1996; "Fire Safety for Your Church." Church Mutual Insurance Company 1996.